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RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

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DEPT FOR SE GRATION, S/USSES, AF A/S, AF/C, AF/E, INR/AA
NSC FOR MGAVIN
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN
ADDIS ABABA ALSO FOR USAU

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PTER PINR SU

SUBJECT: LONG-TIME NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY
SERVICE (NISS) DIRECTOR GENERAL REMOVED

Classified By: CDA Robert E. Whitehead for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (c) Summary. On August 13 President al Bashir sent a shock-wave through Khartoum political circles with a decree replacing long-time NISS Director General (DG) Salah Abdallah, better known as Salah Ghosh, with NISS Deputy Director Major General Mohammed Atta al-Moula. Ghosh will join the Presidency as an advisor, one of fourteen, with exact duties as yet unclear. Although there has been recent talk about a possible shake-up at NISS, the announcement that the influential Ghosh was out has provoked widespread speculation and a welter of rumors in Khartoum. There is no clear answer about why Bashir removed Ghosh at this time, but there is a consensus that the Government of Sudan (GOS) and National Congress Party (NCP) viewed Ghosh as a lightning rod for Sudan's international detractors because of his role in the conflict in Darfur. Through his reassignment to a lower profile position, the GOS may hope to lower the temperature as well. We do not know how much influence Ghosh will continue to wield behind the scenes, or if his departure will have a significant impact on counter terrorism cooperation with Sudan. End summary.

¶2. (c) DG Ghosh has headed NISS since the 1990s and is widely recognized as one of President Bashir's most trusted advisers; thus, the abrupt announcement that he has been reassigned from the NISS to the Presidency took Khartoum by surprise. Despite recent reports that change at the top of NISS was imminent, rumors and speculation immediately flooded the town. Some claim that Ghosh crossed influential business partners close to Bashir and was further undercut by feuds with the heads of competing security services. Other sources say that for the past two years influential NCP insiders have increasingly called for the ouster of Ghosh due to what they see as serious mistakes in his handling of the Darfur and Chad portfolios. The fact remains, however, that no one has yet provided compelling evidence for any of these claims.

¶3. (c) From preliminary conversations within diplomatic and political milieus, we are increasingly convinced that Ghosh's reassignment is not the consequence of any single misstep. Known for his efficiency and organizational skills, Ghosh has long enjoyed Bashir's favor, and his stock moved up even higher when NISS forces under Ghosh's direction were instrumental in turning back the Justice and Equality Movement attack on Omdurman in May 2008 (to the chagrin of senior military commanders). It is a fact, however, that from the beginning of the Darfur conflict in 2003, Ghosh has been closely associated in the eyes of the international press and advocacy groups with GOS actions there, including

the use of so-called jinjaweed proxies. As such, Ghosh has been a high-profile public relations liability to the GOS/NCP. NCP insiders may have decided to shunt him to a lower profile siding in the presidency as they attempt to find some solution in Darfur, to lower the international temperature in the meantime.

¶4. (s) Comment. Some of our contacts insist that the reassignment is a major demotion for Ghosh, but we withhold judgment for now. His replacement is a long-time Ghosh loyalist, which may mean that Ghosh will continue to wield some level of influence from behind the scenes. There is no indication that Ghosh was relieved because of his support for counter terrorism cooperation with the US, which some NCP hard-liners opposed. Despite repeated threats to visiting American delegations that he was prepared to sever these connections over Sudan's continued designation as a state sponsor of terrorism, Ghosh had maintained cooperation until now. We cannot yet assess what impact, if any, Ghosh's departure will have on US counter terrorism equities in Sudan. End comment.

¶5. (c) Bio note. Major General Mohammed Atta al-Moula is a long time NISS officer, an Arab from Northern Sudan with reported National Islamic Front (precursor to the NCP) bloodlines. Further reporting will follow in other channels. Charge and RAO Chief will seek a meeting with him at first opportunity.

WHITEHEAD